

Dear Distinguished Committee Members:

I write in support of HB 5283 An Act Concerning the Education Cost Sharing Grant.

I am a Norwalk resident. I have four children aged 5-14 all of whom attend Norwalk Public Schools. My wife and I are active in our local community and schools. As I reflect on this bill, my comment to all of you is - what is more important to all of us than the education of our children and why are each of you dedicating your time to public service? This is not a Democrat or Republican issue. We are a "village" and a real issue exists about what resources the State makes available to some children in our village for education. I implore all of you to consider the real and basic inequity which is occurring in Connecticut and recognize this bill as an opportunity to be not mere politicians but true statesmen and stateswomen.

Equity should be the true goal with public education. Democrats and Republicans alike value education. Education supports the goals of both parties. In Norwalk we see every day the full extent of income inequality's effect on public education. Our neighboring towns are wealthy and that is reflected in the metrics you are now examining with test scores and college acceptances. Internally, Norwalk itself is a test case on income inequality. Our property values as a whole are quite high compared to other CT towns, because wealthy areas of Norwalk have high home values. But the average and the mean in Norwalk does not reflect most citizens' lives. Wealthy areas drastically skew the metrics used by the ECS system resulting in great inequity for Norwalk students.

In Norwalk, the end result is that the wealthy opt out of the public system and send their children to the many nearby private schools.

With four children in Norwalk public schools elementary, middle and high school, I have come to know quite a lot of educators and administrators in the Norwalk Public School system and found them to be passionate, professional, smart, enthusiastic educators. Our parents too are involved and volunteer to help. The effort and skill is there but the resources and funding is not. There is not enough to support our students, most of whom qualify as working poor, English as second language, special needs and other. Assure yourselves that you are not hearing from them because they are busy working and raising their families right now, they lack easy internet access, and the luxury of commenting on pending legislation that even I with a doctorate degree fail to fully understand let alone your process and what you are being asked to assess and report on HB 5283.

Inequality in education funding is a statewide issue. It affects Democrats and Republicans. It benefits all CT residents if our legislature can review our ECS system and make it better and more equitable. Yes Norwalk supports this bill but other communities and Democrats and Republicans should support the principles that this bill espouses. Re-examine the school funding calculation please. Connecticut is a test case for income inequality and you have the opportunity now to support a bill that asks the legislature to explore this issue.

I think HB 5283 is a modest step in the right direction towards equity in public education funding. It is an acknowledgment at least that the system needs to be reviewed to see what the real and practical effects are. I am aware that any change results in changes to some towns that receive funding. But I ask that all of you consider why you have chosen public service as your profession. You can represent your constituents zealously by in this instance recognizing the greater good that an equitable public education funding system serves all of Connecticut. With education it is truly not us versus them. A rising tide raises all boats.

A vote in favor of HB 5283 is a vote in favor of seeking better equity in public education.

Thank you for your consideration,

Matthew J. Smith

7 Trolley Place

Norwalk, CT 06853